THE BRITISH EMPIRE

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98 Weekly parts No. 24

SPECKS UPON THE SEA

A Scattering of Imperial Islands

Australia & New Zealand 70c South Africa 70c Canada 95c

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Deputy Editor John Man
Picture Editor Jean I. Tennant
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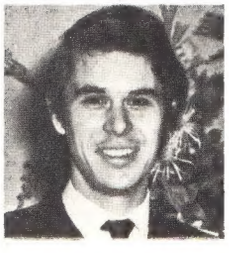
Consultants D. K. Fieldhouse, Lecturer in Commonwealth History and Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford
A. F. Madden, Reader in Commonwealth Government and Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford



SIMON RIGGE, who wrote this issue, was born in one small island colony, Bermuda, and lived for two years in another, Hong Kong. He read philosophy, politics and economics at Oxford University and has since worked on historical magazines in London. He was Executive Editor of Purnell's *History of the 20th Century*, for which he wrote a dozen articles, and is now a staff writer on *The British Empire*.

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BY THE WAY

This issue marks the completion of roughly six months of publication of THE BRITISH EMPIRE – an appropriate moment to appraise its reception by our readers.

On the whole, the response has been good. Along with the compliments, however, there have been a certain number of criticisms. In a few instances, readers have caught errors of fact. The worst of these, as many shocked Devonians were quick to point out, occurred in the throw-away cover of the first issue where it was stated that Sir Francis Drake was a Cornishman, a mistake not reproduced in the magazine itself.

In a one-million-word history, such as this, mistakes are almost inevitable and we welcome the invaluable aid supplied by readers kind enough to point them out. In fact, we even take a perverse sort of satisfaction in letters that contain criticism: these, we feel, are the best indication that readers are deeply interested and sufficiently involved to make their feelings known.

For example, there have been complaints that certain words and phrases used in these pages were Americanisms. Three words in particular – "gritty," "gobbledegook" and in particular "showdown" created a special stir. Two of these certainly originated in the United States, but it is generally accepted that the genius of the English language stems in large measure from its flexibility and we felt they had been used sufficiently often to justify their inclusion. The first two, incidentally, appear in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* without even a baleful bracketed "(U.S.)" to indicate that they are not thoroughly British, and "showdown" is a perfectly good card-playing term, only in its metaphorical sense being "chiefly U.S." Even this, however, has appeared several times in British newspapers recently, a reminder that useful words usually find a place in our peculiarly receptive language.

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Cover: British seamen haul up a cannon during their occupation of Diamond Rock which for a year in the Napoleonic Wars became one of Britain's innumerable, obscure island possessions.

SPECKS UPON THE SEA

Many of Britain's island colonies were no more remarkable than specks of dust in ageing atlases, the dross of empire caught up in Europe's headlong rush to world supremacy, acquired and forgotten. Most historians have paid them scant attention, conceding them perhaps a phrase, perhaps a sentence. But remote, isolated communities, mere pinpricks of land where wind and waves forcefully assert the supremacy of nature, have a fascination of their own in the age of technological mastery and considerable historical interest as well.

At the end of the 19th Century, Britain had acquired more islands than any other European power, but not through a conscious policy of expansion. The government was positively reluctant to annex islands, and only did so when forced by circumstances. In this, the history of the islands reflects the history of the Empire as a whole. For it shows the government being dragged forward by the restless surge of a developing society, by the dynamic force that swept British explorers and traders to all parts of the world. It is a story with an ironic aftermath, for today the once-reluctant government still bears responsibility for many island peoples ❧

Britain's island empire has always been something of a mystery. Even in the heyday of empire at the end of the 19th Century, when London publishers vied to produce the most detailed, comprehensive handbook on empire, many of the smallest islands invariably slipped the net. The editors of the red-bound official handbook, the *Colonial Office List*, admitted weakly in 1900 that "a number of islands and rocks throughout the world are British territory. . . ." Just how many escaped them. The sample tucked away under "Miscellaneous Possessions" is given far less prominence than the advertisements for colonial equipment: saddlery and harness, tropical pianos with "Colonial riveted keys," deck-chairs, and the remarkable "specific," Dr. J. Collis Browne's Chlorodyne, which claimed to cure all manner of colonial afflictions, from coughs and colds to diarrhoea and cholera. In fact, few colonial readers would have disputed the editors' order of priorities, for their own comfort was more interesting than miscellaneous islands leased to obscure companies for the planting of coconuts or collecting of guano, centuries-old deposits of bird droppings, used for fertilizer.

A short survey of Britain's island empire is enough to show how real were the problems which faced harassed compilers, and indeed the problems of anyone who wishes to explain why Britain acquired so many islands.

By 1900, at the climax of the scramble for empire, Britain had bagged a large proportion of the Pacific islands, notably the Fijis, the Solomons and the Gilbert and Ellice Islands; the vast majority of Indian Ocean islands, including Zanzibar, Mauritius, the Seychelles and the Nicobar and Andaman Islands; several remote islands in the South Atlantic, such as St. Helena, Tristan da Cunha and the Falkland Islands, and Cyprus and Malta in the Mediterranean. Finally, she had the largest European holding in the Caribbean, the once-valuable sugar islands of the West Indies. These, with nearby Bermuda, were Britain's oldest island colonies and long past their prime.

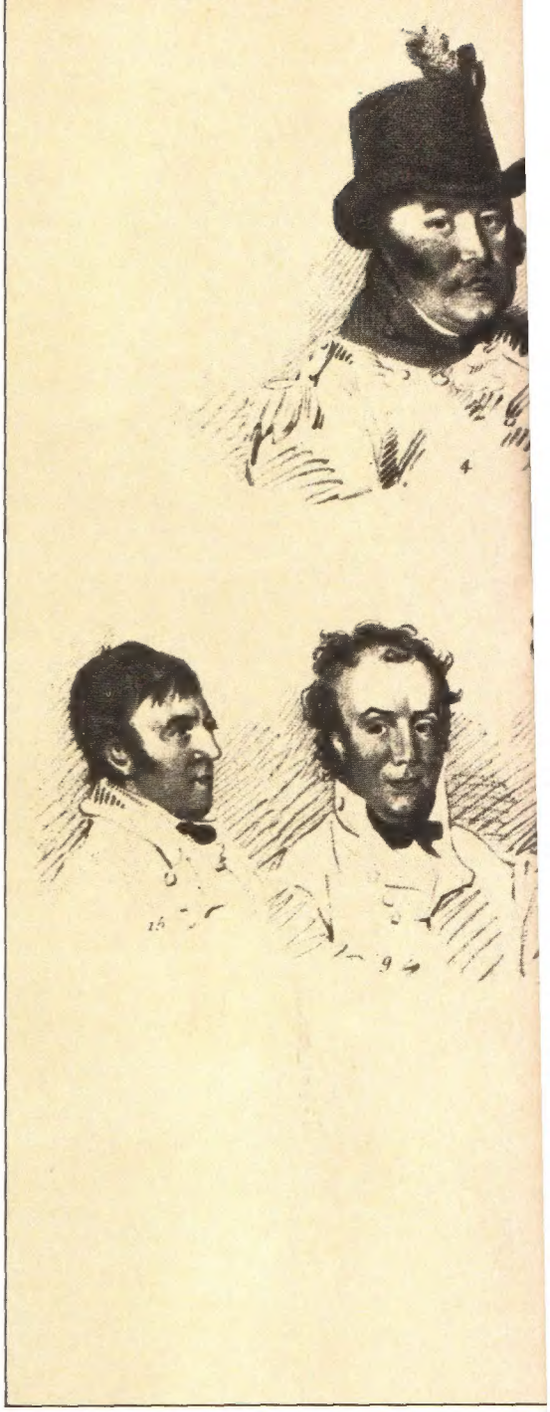
In all, Britain had several thousand specks on the sea. There are, for example, 204 Andaman islands, 322 Fijis (216 uninhabited) and 3,100 Bahamas (700 islands and 2,400 islets). Vast distances separate the islands, especially in the Pacific, which accounts for half the world's surface. They are the remotest places on earth. The islanders are hopelessly isolated from what Tristanians call, in their high-pitched dialect of English, the "houtside warl." Surrounded by sea, they scan the horizon untiringly for sight of a ship and divide their years by ships' visits rather than months.

It was an empire of great diversity, exotic to the point of absurdity. It spanned a vast range of landscapes, peoples and climates: from the 18th-Century utopia of the Polynesian islands in the South Pacific, with their waving palms and apparently free-loving noble savages, to the heart-chilling wastes of the South Sandwich Islands, permanently icebound; from the neat white bungalows and bougainvillaea of the sun-drenched West Indies, to the deep leather armchairs and crystal chandeliers of the Hong Kong club, set well apart from the narrow teeming streets and the appalling smell of the fish markets.

At the absurd level, Spratly Island and Amboyna Cay in the China Sea were mere sandbanks affording a little dried fish and seasonal turtle-hunting. Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean was "nowhere more than ten feet high," reported the Colonial Office. The most insignificant islands have names – Large, Round, Green, Bird – that suggest a failure of imagination by their discovers, or even drunkenness: no doubt Roast Beef Island and Plum Pudding Island were named during Christmas celebrations.

Such levels of absurdity did not escape the Victorians. A London society woman bidding farewell to a friend on his departure in 1867 for Labuan, a sweaty coaling station marooned in the sea off Borneo, wryly hoped he would amuse himself "sitting under a banana tree staring at an alligator," though neither of these existed on the island. There was a standing joke about Ascension, the volcanic island which, it was said, the British seized as soon as it cooled. A visitor, horror-struck by its bleakness, wrote in 1877: "No nation coveted its barren shores until the British lion stretched out a paw in 1815 and gathered it into his heap of treasures."

Was the British lion suffering from



acute land hunger? With so many such extraordinary island "treasures," he is easy to represent as an imperialist monster voraciously devouring even the left-overs of empire. But that is grossly unfair. For it is the paradox of the great age of European expansion, the 19th Century, that its greatest empire was built by a nation whose government had a very small imperial appetite.

Britain could have grabbed vast numbers of islands near the beginning of the century. On the morrow of Waterloo in 1815, with France defeated and Europe exhausted from the Napoleonic Wars, Britain was the most powerful nation in

These British officers and midshipmen spent 18 gruelling months during the Napoleonic Wars garrisoning Diamond Rock, a minute island in the West Indies which, though barely habitable, was of passing strategic importance. It was a typical case history in the expansion of Britain's empire of tiny islands.

the world. Above all, she was a sea power. Her fleet, victorious at Trafalgar, was the largest in the world, as was her merchant navy. Her ships placed innumerable islands within her reach.

But she did not take advantage of the fact. Napoleon, the master strategist, was surprised. "Probably for a thousand years such another opportunity of aggrandizing England will not occur," he told a visitor to his island prison of St. Helena. "You ought never to have allowed the French or any other nation to put their nose beyond the Cape." Sixty years later he would still have been surprised, for by then Britain had picked up only odds and ends for various and sometimes odd reasons.

Napoleon's own presence on St. Helena demanded that a small garrison be sent to Tristan da Cunha in 1816, while another group settled down in dismay to a staple diet of turtle soup on bleak Ascension. Pitcairn – with its own peculiar constitution incorporating laws for dogs, cats and hogs, and also female suffrage – joined the Empire in 1838 because settlers, descended from the *Bounty* mutineers, asked a visiting naval captain for official protection and he saw fit to grant it. The Kuria Muria Islands were ceded in 1854 for the purpose of landing a telegraph-cable. The Andaman Islands were taken in 1857 in an attempt to stop the savage islanders' murderous attacks on shipwrecked crews.

There was no clearly thought-out policy in all this. The British government had no master plan for annexations and took action only to defend the national interest. Many of the islands were picked up in war or times of insecurity, to prevent them falling into enemy hands and becoming a threat to British shipping and trade routes. Hakluyt, the great naval historian of the late 16th Century, had put this among several reasons for empire when he advocated "the speedy planting

in divers fit places lest we be pre-vented by the enemy." Nelson said much the same thing in 1799 about Malta, which was seized the year after. Mauritius was taken in 1810 because it was already a threat: French privateers were using its harbour at Port Louis to harry British shipping on the route to India. In peacetime many of these acquisitions became "white elephants" and some – like Reunion – were even returned. It was this approach that so greatly surprised Napoleon.

In questioning Britain's reluctance to annex, Napoleon ought to have remembered his own taunt about the British: that they were a nation of shopkeepers. So long as trade and commerce were not disrupted, there was no official interest in empire. For most of the 19th Century, the age of free trade when Britain was not seriously challenged by other nations, colonies were regarded as drains on the economy and possible causes of war. Just as India had been run by a big firm – the East India Company – so for a long time many islands were left in the hands of small firms and private entrepreneurs. Men on the spot – self-seeking individualists, missionaries, dealers in forced labour – did as they wished, especially in the Pacific, where innumerable islands remained unannexed until the very end of the 19th Century. Upon these men lies the guilt for the crimes of the West against the primitive societies of Polynesia.

Sealers, whalers, sandalwood traders, dealers in coconut oil and copra, tortoiseshell merchants, beachcombers, deserters from ships and escaped convicts all revelled in the free world of remote islands where no government's writ ran and exulted in the astonishing superiority of powder and shot over clubs and spears. Serving no one but themselves – unless it was the devil – they roamed through the helpless islands in increasing numbers as the century wore on.

Among the gifts these unofficial ambassadors of Europe brought to the islands were beads, hatchets and carpenter's tools, guns, trigger-happiness, alcohol, measles and the common cold. By 1845 the island of Rotuma was reported to be "one vast brothel," serving the motley crowd of seafarers, many of them British, swarming among the islands. But that was not the worst of it.

Native societies in the Pacific islands were being overturned by men like the 16 dissidents from the mutiny on the *Bounty*. Unwilling to join a colony in exile, they were put off at Tahiti by the hard-core mutineers to await a chance of returning to Britain, and meanwhile engaging themselves as mercenaries in island wars. With their revolutionary use of firearms, they upset the balance of power between the native tribes. "We have sown the seeds of discord and revolution," sighed Bligh, ex-captain of the *Bounty*, when he heard the fate of Tahiti. The social havoc was not repaired, but replaced by further Westernization.

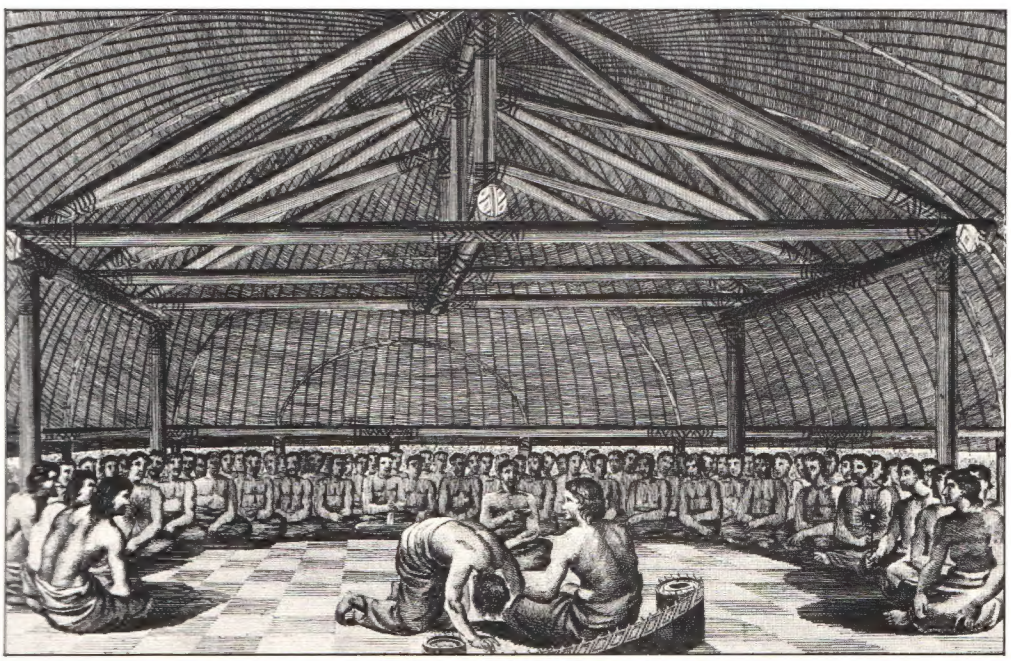
That, if unconsciously, was the aim of the powerful missionary societies which represented Victorian Britain's deep-felt religious humanitarianism. Beginning with Tahiti, where members of the London Missionary Society arrived in 1797, hard on the heels of the departing *Bounty* mutineers, the missionaries dispersed among the islands, reconciling warring tribes, abolishing savage customs such as widow murder, human sacrifice and cannibalism, and building new Christian communities from the wreckage of native societies.

But in the absence of government control from Europe, they set up their own administrations, theocracies that acquired a power and momentum of their own. Some of them indulged in excesses that cast discredit on a basically well-meaning campaign. In Tonga, the Wesleyan missionary Shirley Baker became the greatest power in the land and, ignoring a liberal constitution he had drafted set himself up as a dictator. Such was his power that in 1877, 90 per cent of the population were convicted of offences against the sumptuary laws: failing to wear a pinafore, breaking the law against smoking and other absurdities.

In the 1860s a new menace appeared in the Pacific. This was a labour trade that grew up to supply newly established cotton plantations in the Australian colony of Queensland. It soon degenerated into a near slave-trade, generally referred to as "blackbirding." Many villages and even whole islands in the New Hebrides were stripped of their male populations. There was a case of four islanders sold for pigs, yams and firewood. Then to the horror of the civilized world, a ship, the *Daphne*, was found equipped with slave-decks and all the paraphernalia of the slave-trade except irons.

It was to bring the islanders justice that the British government made a start at political intervention in the Pacific. In 1872 Parliament passed the Pacific Islanders Protection Act and voted money for gunboats. Rather too much was expected of the British Consul in the area who, from his base in Fiji, was made responsible for the whole Pacific Ocean. This was empire on the cheap, and it did not work. Various strengthening measures were passed, but it was only the disturbed and uncertain state of European politics that induced Britain to resort to annexations in the late 1870s.

Then, the new, bitter rivalries of industrializing Europe were projected overseas, and Britain's easy mastery of the oceans was at last challenged. Germany in particular became threatening. She embarked on cloak-and-dagger annexations among the Pacific islands and narrowly escaped war over Samoa



The Pacific islands of Tonga made a great ceremony of drinking *kava*, their intoxicating beverage which, according to one traveller, tasted like soapsuds and looked like dishwater.

with both Britain and the United States – through the intervention of a hurricane, which forced the single British vessel out to sea and completely destroyed both German and American squadrons. Britain was drawn into a "scramble for the Pacific" as hectic as the "scramble for Africa." The strategic need to forestall Germany, the need to protect and control British subjects in the islands, and the protestations of Australia and New Zealand, who had long clamoured for British imperial expansion in the Pacific in order to keep foreigners off their doorstep, made it impossible for Britain to remain half in and half out any longer.

Once the reasons for acquisition faded into history, Britain found herself saddled with numerous islands in which she had no real interest. But they, being helpless, had a very real interest in staying British and today a very large number linger on as relics of empire.

Small islands are out of step with the contemporary world. They cannot catch up with the Industrial Revolution, which requires large economic groupings. They do not have the resources, the capital or the labour to build diversified economies. In trade, many of them have only one major export to offer and are desperately vulnerable to changes in the pattern of world commerce.

In politics too they have been left behind, for they cannot keep up with the trend of nationalism. National independence would be a sham for many. Pitcairn, with a population of barely 100, and Tristan, with no formal administrative system, could only sport laughable armies or diplomatic corps. Even the comparatively sophisticated "associated states" – already self-governing – would always be heavily dependent on a major power for defence and foreign policy.

History has passed the islands by, leaving them as charmed backwaters barely ruffled by 20th-Century man's worst excesses, but also deprived of his greatest advances. Tantalizingly, since the coming of modern communications, the din of the outside world has clamoured like a sirens' song to the islanders, calling them to join the vast masses of humanity in the bustling, burgeoning cities. But if the past is a guide, they will accept deprivation, resist the call and stay with the winds and ocean waves that bound their worlds ❧

This water-colour of Tepou o te Rangi, a chief of Rarotonga in the Cook Islands, was used on lecture tours by the energetic missionary John Williams who nicknamed him Jo Poo to amuse British audiences.

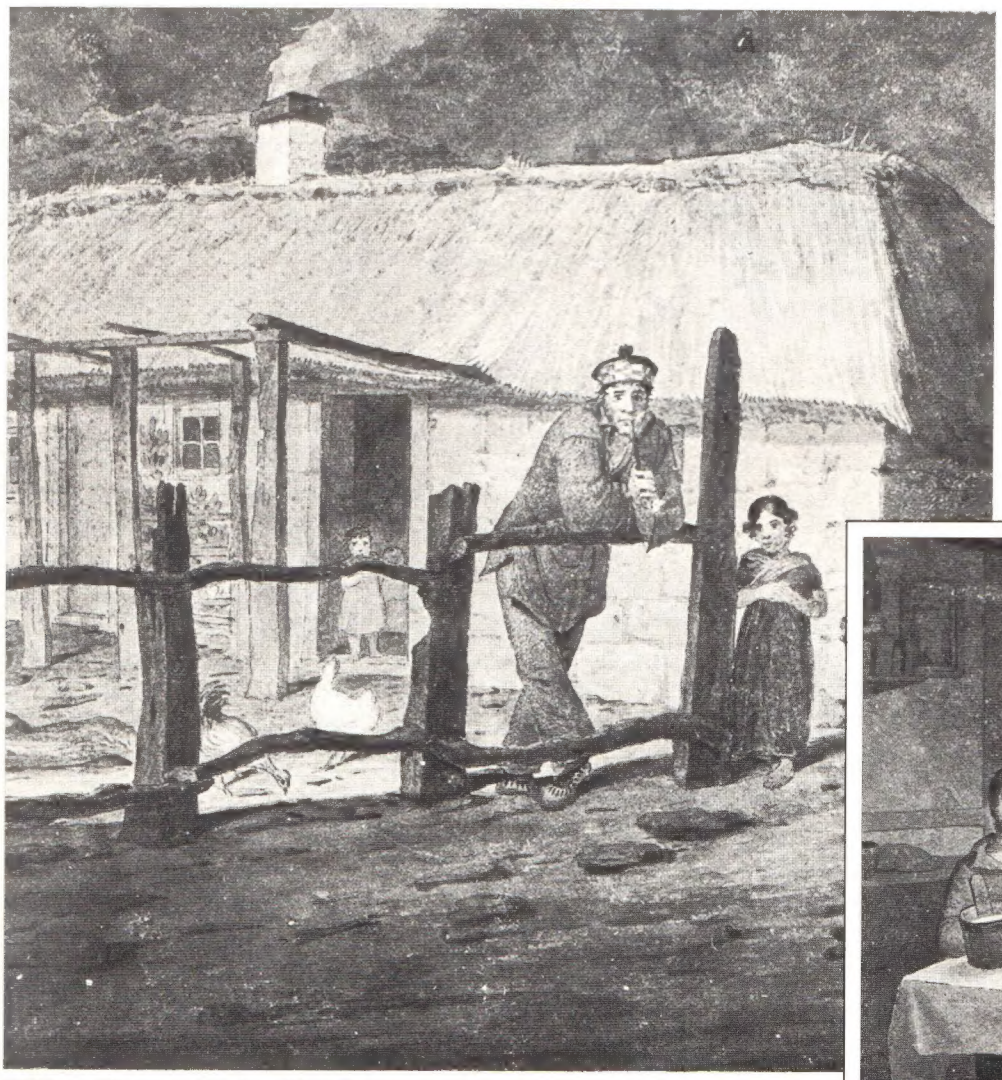
ASCENSION & TRISTAN

A Tristan colonist skins a newly killed sea-elephant to provide leather for home-made moccasins.

Flung up from the long volcanic spine of the Atlantic Ocean, the tiny islands of Ascension and Tristan da Cunha pierce the surface of the sea midway between Africa and South America. They are utterly and frighteningly isolated.

Ascension, occupied by the British in 1815, is a volcanic desert. "Dust, sunshine and cinders, and low yellow houses frizzling in it all," moaned a horrified visitor to this bleak coaling station in 1877.

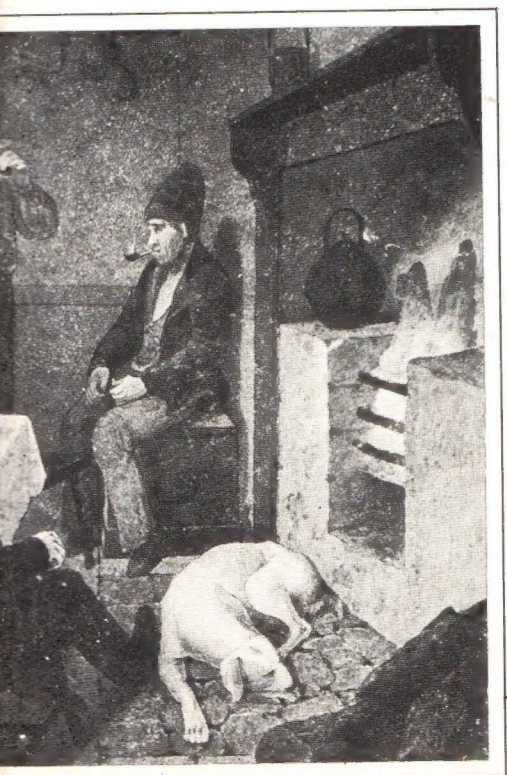
Tristan, too, is a barren place, a mere rock 7½ miles in diameter, with precipitous slopes shuddering under the lash of wind and waves. There was no permanent human settlement until 1816 when a British garrison arrived. Six of its members decided to stay permanently, and this tiny colony has survived, chiefly on a diet of potatoes and natural disasters. Throughout the 19th Century countless marine tragedies caused by Tristan's capricious storms provided wrecks for salvage and a steady trickle of castaways who "swallowed the anchor," settled and helped boost the population to about 80. The worst disaster – when Tristan's "extinct" volcano erupted in 1961 and forced the people's evacuation for a year – brought a rush of world-wide sympathy and financial aid that saved this fiercely loyal British colony from oblivion.



William Glass, a pipe-smoking Scot seen here in 1824, was Tristan's founding father. He and his Cape-coloured wife reared 16 children, nucleus of the Tristan people.

Indoors, Tristan's first settlers make the best of small mercies like potatoes and "famine tea" (hot milk and water) with easy-going stoicism. Hardship? "We's used to it," they still explain without rancour.

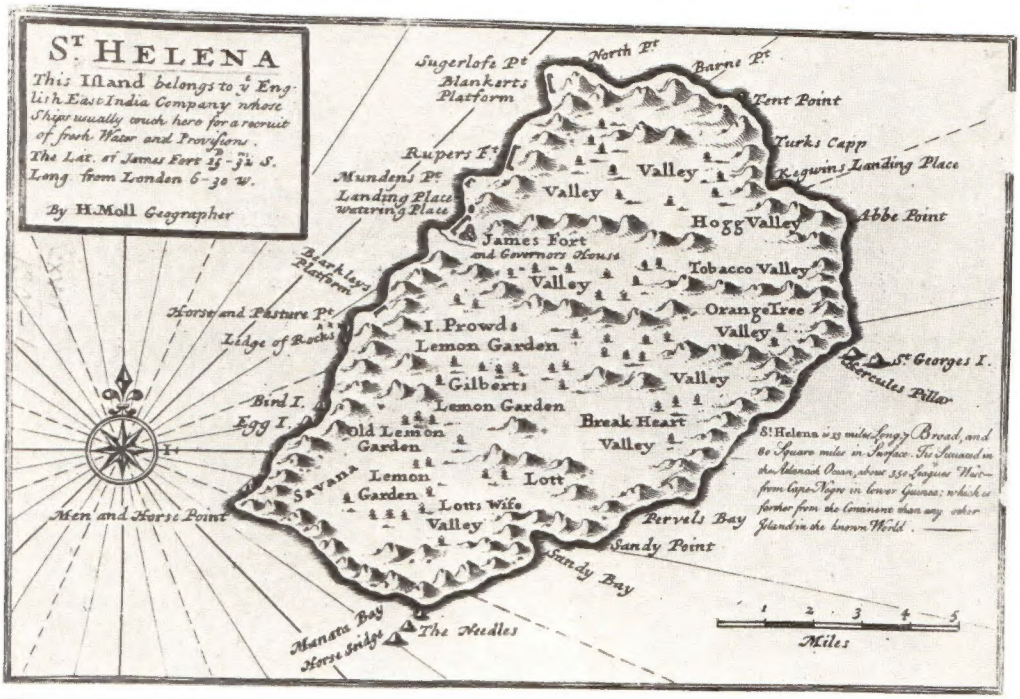
In the above painting of Ascension Island in 1852, Commander Need of H.M.S. *Linnet* rather exaggerated its greenness. A truer view of this arid clinker of an island (right) shows the caves which supplied the island's water. British officials ride up to investigate empty water-barrels.



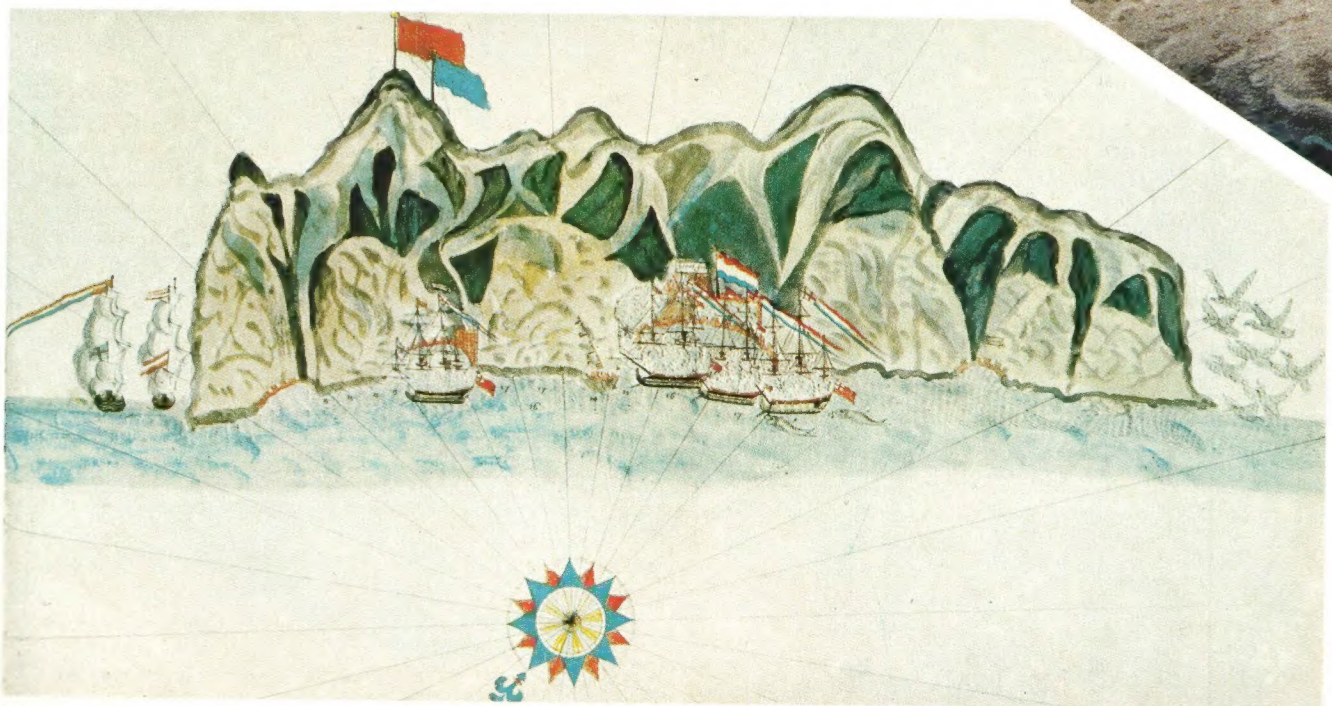
ST. HELENA

Though dismissed as a "meer wart in the ocean" by an early navigator, St. Helena, with its green valleys and well-wooded peaks, is the emerald isle of the mid-South Atlantic. The Portuguese were delighted when they discovered it in 1502, and made it a secret port of call for their ships, which revictualled there with gourds, pomegranates, oranges, lemons, fresh meat and tropical fish. When the British and Dutch arrived nearly a century later, they were as delighted as the Portuguese, and in the next century clouds of gunsmoke sporadically enveloped the island as the rival powers disputed possession.

In 1658 the British East India Company laid a formal claim, backed it by building a castle, James Fort, and made St. Helena a staging-post on the route to India. Visitors and guests have been vital to the well-being of this "inn upon the seas" ever since. The best-known "visitor" was Napoleon, whose imprisonment there after the Battle of Waterloo did more than anything to put St. Helena on the map.

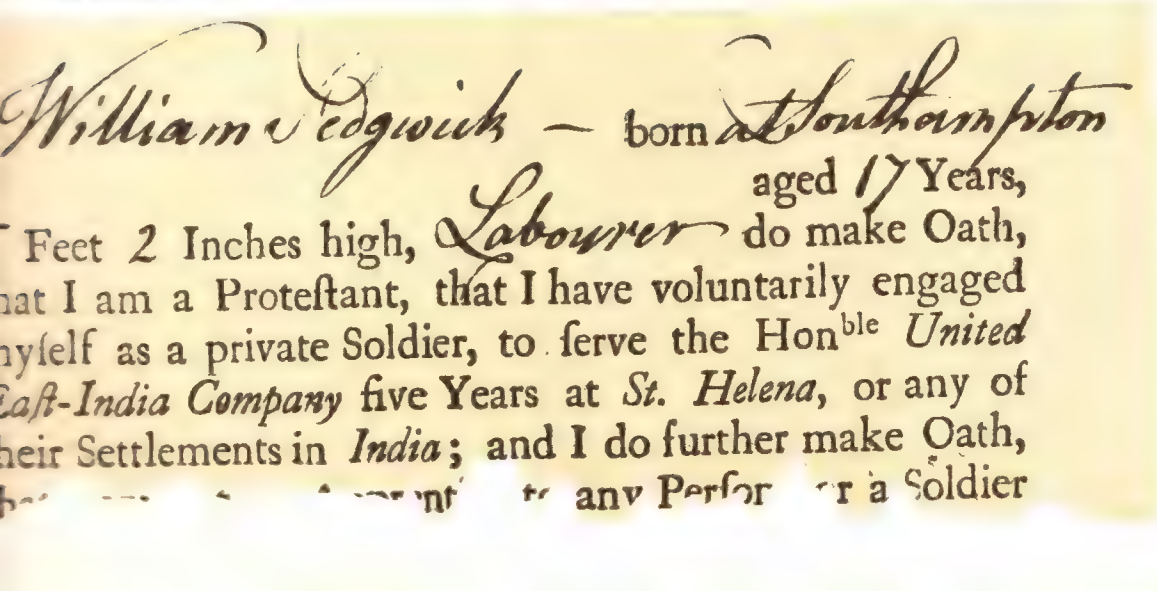


This map shows Helena in the 17th Century when the islanders lived up among the rocky peaks and abundant lemon gardens. Jamestown, the future capital, was no more than "James Fort."



Clouds of gunsmoke billow into the rigging as a British fleet defeats the rival Dutch for the last time in 1673.

The houses in 18th-Century Jamestown were left deserted except when the ships were in and the settlers raced down from their hill-side farms.



William Sedgwick — born at Southampton
aged 17 Years,
Feet 2 Inches high, Labourer do make Oath,
hat I am a Proteſtant, that I have voluntarily engaged
nyſelf as a private Soldier, to ſerve the Hon^ble *United*
Eaſt-India Company five Years at *St. Helena*, or any of
heir Settlements in *India*; and I do further make Oath,
anv Perſor r a Soldier

By this contract of 1770, an English teenager signed on for military service in St. Helena, owned and run by the East India Company till 1834.

The vicious Atlantic rollers that occasionally batter Jamestown's shores destroyed 13 vessels within a few hours on a February morning in 1846, an event commemorated in this painting. The slowly heaving masses of water, imperceptible only 500 yards out, turn into giant breakers as they hit the steeply sloping sea-bed close inshore under the cliffs.

St. Helena: the Eagle's Cage

Napoleon, who as Emperor of France had once burst the bounds of Europe, was caged from 1815 till his death in 1821 within the 47 square miles of St. Helena. The British made a fetish of security, subjecting St. Helenians to a curfew and a total embargo on trade. In the event; Napoleon scarcely ventured outside the few acres of formal gardens he had personally planned at Longwood, the white colonial house in the mountains where his rump court resided. He spent most days in court dress, weeding.

While Napoleon was alive, St. Helenians had plenty of business providing for the large British garrison and the lavish imperial household, which spent £12,000 a year (of British taxpayers' money) on supplies. Later, a long decline set in. In 1834 the Crown took over, and cut costs ruthlessly. After the Suez Canal opened in 1869, shipping dwindled. In 1907 the garrison was withdrawn and the island now subsists on a government grant.

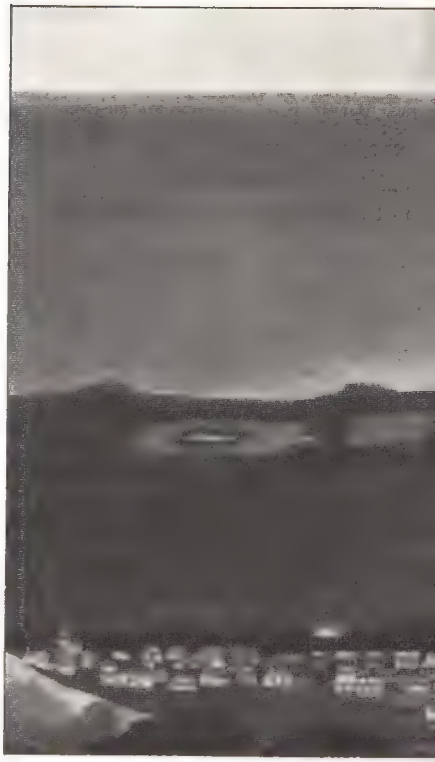
It was dusk before Napoleon, sitting in the bows, was rowed ashore at St. Helena on October 17, 1815, for he refused to face the curious crowds waiting on the shore till after sunset.

MAURITIUS

Queen Alexandra, consort of Edward VII, once wrongly addressed a letter to "Mauritius, British West Indies." The island in fact lies 600 miles east of Madagascar, in the Indian Ocean. Alexandra's confusion was understandable: Mauritius is a sugar island with waving cane-fields reminiscent of Barbados or Jamaica and it was also won by conquest, like many West Indian islands. The British seized the French-owned island in 1810 to safeguard the route to India. In 1814, at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, France formally ceded it and its numerous dependent islands, which are scattered widely across the Indian Ocean.

The take-over was much resented by French inhabitants, who in the 100 years since their arrival had established, on the basis of a wealthy slave-based economy, a sophisticated society. Their fine, well-paved city of Port Louis boasted an opera-house, large, well-stocked book-shops, a school that upheld the French tradition of education, and seven daily newspapers. The island's aristocratic families maintained close links with Paris and were staunch Roman Catholics. They took a dim view of the commercially minded British, of other European traders who now arrived in the colony, of the increasing discrimination in favour of Protestants, of the insidious spread of the English language.

After the abolition of slavery in 1833, a flood of Indian labourers was poured into the sugar plantations, so that by 1881 fully 69 per cent of the population were Indians. They were yet another social ingredient added to the mixture of French, British and Mauritians of African descent. Hindu-Muslim riots became frequent. Up in the mountains, where a scented wind from the ocean cooled the verandas of Government House, the British Governor could forget the stifling tropical heat of Port Louis. But there was no forgetting the equally stifling, explosive mix of Mauritius politics that still troubles the now independent island.



Port Louis's fine natural harbour, seen

In a first attempt to take Mauritius on August 23, 1810, British frigates close slowly at dusk and engage the French fleet in a furious action that lasted three days and ended in a total British defeat.

British troops advancing on Port Louis skirmish with the French for control of the ammunition stores. After heavy fighting, the vastly outnumbered French capitulated on December 3, 1810.

The sea comes alive with boats as 16,000

here crowded with newly arrived British ships, was the key to the Indian Ocean – and well worth the major military operation it took to seize it.

British troops hurriedly sent from India disembark on November 29, 1810, during the second, and this time successful, attack on the island.

1 PITCAIRN 1
2 ASCENSION 2
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3 DIAMOND ROCK 5
6 REDONDA 6
7 MAURITIUS 1
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10 FIJI 10
8 ANDAMAN 8
9 NICOBAR 9

DIAMOND ROCK

During the Napoleonic Wars, a 600-foot tooth of basalt off the French West Indian island of Martinique acquired a sudden strategic importance for the British. Seized and properly fortified, Diamond Rock, as it was called, might so dominate the approaches to Martinique as to bring the sugar-rich island to its knees. "Thirty riflemen will keep the hill against ten thousand," enthused Commodore Samuel Hood, Commander-in-Chief of the Leeward Islands, and in 1804 he dispatched 120 men from his flagship, the *Centaur*, to occupy the crag, inhabited only by sea-birds and crabs.

They found the climate good and the scenery awesome: John Eckstein, an artist who was attached to Hood's force and who did the watercolours on these pages, wrote lyrically: "When you are on the top, the sublime fastens on your soul." A week after landing, two 24-pounder cannon for shore-side batteries were hauled in through the surf. Then came the most difficult operation. Sailors rigged an aerial cableway from the *Centaur* to a cliff-top and swung three more guns from the pitching flagship high up on to the rock's side. Safely landed, two cannon were borne triumphantly to the summit and the third installed half-way up. A royal salute was fired.

Men on the cliff-top, almost hidden by bushes, haul the barrel of a cannon along the 100-yard hawser attached to the *Centaur*. To one officer on the ship's deck, the men looked "like mice hauling a little sausage." Two of the *Centaur*'s boats steady the load from either side with cables.

Rough handling in the surf had no ill-effects on the two 24-pounders intended for the lower batteries.

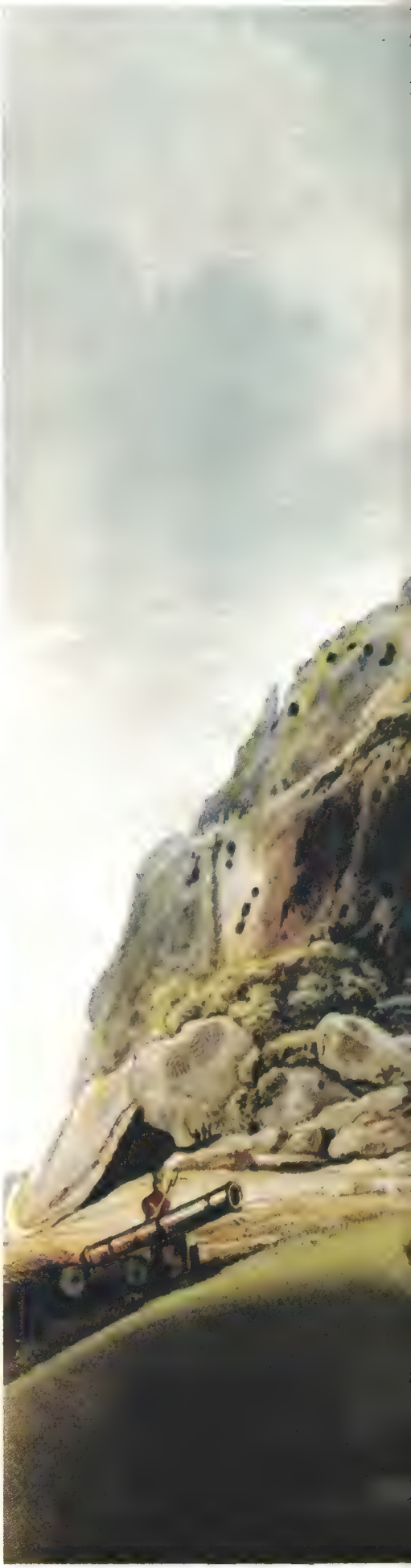
Diamond Rock: a Natural Fortress

With the guns in place, the brooding rock was soon echoing to the roar of forges and ring of hammers as blacksmiths and carpenters bent themselves to perfecting its defences. On March 1 the fortress took on 3,000 gallons of water and four months' provisions. A wiser commander might have stockpiled for a long siege.

The French on Martinique seemed helpless: they had done nothing to impede the landing of guns on Diamond Rock and in their first attack, their ships were scattered by the treacherous inshore currents. It took Vice-Admiral Pierre de Villeneuve's arrival in Martinique in May, 1805, to seal the Rock's fate. His attack began auspiciously. The French intercepted the Rock's powder-supplies from St. Lucia and thus seriously impaired its ability to withstand a long siege. After delivering a three-day bombardment, during which the Rock's commander was forced to abandon his lower batteries, the French stormed ashore and made preparations to carry the heights.

It was an agonizing moment for the British commander. He had intended to defend the rock to the last musket-ball, but, aware of his shortages of water and ammunition, he decided to spare his men the fury of the impending French assault. On June 2, he surrendered.

The Rock's garrison of seamen converted caves into comfortable sleeping quarters (above) and, with the ingenuity that was expected of British tars, hoisted heavy loads and nervous comrades up the cliff (below) in a large cask popularly known as the "Mailcoach."



Immediately after the first French broadside t

guns of the "Queen's Battery" at the water's edge were spiked, the gunners pulled back and the position abandoned.

NICOBAR & ANDAMAN

In the lazy, humid Eden of the Nicobar Islands, a boatman glides in past bamboo stakes, tied with leaves as devil-scarers, to his village of thatched, one-room houses, raised on posts to avoid high water.

The Andaman islanders, unlike the Mongolian-stock Nicobarese, are a primitive negroid people. Shipwrecked crews discovered with alarm that they used their bows and wooden-tipped arrows to hunt men as well as animals.

In the Bay of Bengal lies an island group that, since the 13th Century, has been called Nicobar, the Land of the Naked. Since the climate is like a Turkish bath, the islanders wear at most skimpy loin-cloths consisting of genital pockets on strings. After the islands became British in 1869, officials and missionaries found the way of life amazingly idle, immoral and superstitious. The Nicobarese, having ample supplies of nutritious coconuts and an exhausting climate, worked only when they had to; living communally, bodily functions were public and love free; being animists, their lives were dominated by fear of spirits and devils.

But the islanders were not unintelligent and they constructed good, rainproof houses, planted productive gardens and conducted complex bartering transactions. By strange contrast, the adjacent Andaman islanders, who also went naked, were primitive savages who in the mid 19th Century had not progressed beyond the Stone Age, had no fixed homes and could not count above three.

REDONDA

Redonda in the West Indies is chiefly interesting for its total insignificance. The most widely quoted fact about it is a five-word literary allusion by Charles Kingsley who uninspiringly called it "the lonely rock of Redonda." Now uninhabited, it lies 25 miles from Antigua, of which it is a dependency. Though Columbus called it "the Round" (Redonda), it is in fact oval: one mile long and a third as wide. The two major events in its history occurred in 1865: natives from Antigua began phosphate-digging and an obscure Irishman landed and proclaimed himself "King," so initiating a crank dynasty that survives in London under its present "monarch" who till recently managed a pub in the Tottenham Court Road.

British merchantmen and their crews disturb the seagulls at Redonda, loading phosphate shovelled down a pipe from the 1,000-foot summit.

From the island's diggings, open until the 1920s, the Redonda Phosphate Company exported the raw material to be made into fertilizer.

BOUNTY

THE BOUNTY AND PITCAIRN

When news of the mutiny on H.M. Armed Merchant Vessel *Bounty*, shown here, spread across the Empire, quite a few eminent men in London and the Caribbean were outraged. The influential sugar-planters of the West Indies had been eagerly awaiting the *Bounty*'s cargo of breadfruit trees from the South Pacific that were to have produced a cheaper diet for their slaves. In Parliament, the West India lobby were angered because all their ingenuity in elevating breadfruit to a question of national urgency had been wasted. George III, who had himself enthusiastically ordered the *Bounty* project, was annoyed.

Above all, the Sea Lords were annoyed. Harassed by the King, they had paid £1,950 for a nearly new three-masted coaster and spent a fortune from Admiralty funds on improvements: copper plating for the hull, three new ship's boats, 14 guns, extra-quality rigging. Finally, the main cabin in the stern had been turned into a splendid greenhouse with accommodation for 626 breadfruit shoots. Criss-crossed by planks with holes for flowerpots, it looked like a giant egg-box. Now all this was lost.

The last sight of the ship, breadfruit trees still on board, is recorded in this print showing the Captain (still in his night clothes) and loyal subordinates being set adrift in the ship's launch.

The *Bounty* disappeared like a phantom into the boundless Pacific and was not heard of again for 19 years. Then, from the mists of oblivion, emerged the story of the strangest, most ill-begotten island colony in the history of the Empire.

Pitcairn: Colony of Chaos

The Admiralty made a fatal mistake when they chose the *Bounty*. Even by 18th-Century standards she was small, a mere 215 tons. What with a botanist, the carpenters, petty officers and other non-active crew members essential for the long voyage, she had room for only 14 overworked able seamen out of a total crew of 44, one solitary corporal to conduct military operations and suppress mutinies, and no commissioned officers at all to support the captain.

As the conscientious 33-year-old Captain, William Bligh, battled out from Spithead through heavy seas in December, 1787, he felt confident he could overcome the deficiencies of his crew. He reduced the number of the watches. He appointed the amiable, 24-year-old Fletcher Christian to an acting commission as second-in-command. He provided lemon juice and sauerkraut to ward off scurvy and saw that the bilges and decks were regularly flushed down for freshness and hygiene.

Unfortunately, Bligh was a perfectionist and acted with scant regard for human feelings. His constant badgering and violent fits of temper when obstructed poisoned the otherwise fresh and healthy atmosphere on board ship.

Tahiti promised a release of tension. As the storm-scarred *Bounty* dropped anchor in the early morning of October 26, 1788, off the golden sands and coconut palms of Matavai Bay, lithe natives swarmed aboard from canoes with fresh fruit and suckling pigs.

With the men came a bevy of Polynesian girls, already famed in Europe for their sexual freedom. Bligh allowed the girls to stay the night. It was a pleasurable start to 23 lazy weeks of shore routine.

But paradise turned sour. Discipline slipped deplorably. Worst of all, Bligh's relations with his only commissioned officer cooled, perhaps from jealousy of Christian's greater success with women.

Once the *Bounty* weighed anchor for home in spring, 1789, with a full cargo of breadfruit shoots, Bligh found it hard to restore shipboard routine. Soon he was loosing slanderous tirades at his "hell-hounds, beasts and infamous wretches" of a crew, especially at Christian who, being a sensitive person, was deeply hurt. After an absurd row over some missing coconuts, one of the crew found Christian at 4 a.m. pacing his cabin "much out of order." The sailor whispered darkly that the men were "ripe for anything."

Only half aware of what he was doing, the distracted Christian agreed to lead a mutiny. Just after three bells – 5.30 a.m. – he was at the Captain's bedside with two armed men. "Mr. Bligh, you are my prisoner," he declared melodramatically.

By 8 a.m., amid the utmost confusion as the mutineers toasted themselves in rum, the Captain and his loyal supporters were being dispatched in the ship's boat. A couple of shots were fired over their heads "for fun" with a final imprecation "Blow the bugger's brains out." In fact, after an epic 3,500-mile voyage, Bligh's open boat reached safety six weeks later in the Dutch East Indies.

The mutineers had condemned themselves to eternal exile. Only the gallows awaited them in Britain. Now they began a long, lonely search for a new home hidden from the world. With Christian as "captain," they returned to Tahiti to obtain native "wives" and provisions: 460 pigs, 50 goats, innumerable chickens, two dogs, two cats, one bull and one cow. Their first attempt at colonization – on Tupuai, a rocky island 300 miles south of Tahiti – ended dismally in war with the native inhabitants who had stolen the cow. Absurdly, the mutineers ate her to celebrate her recapture.

They then set off with 19 Polynesians – only 12 of them women – in search of an uninhabited island. After a wretched, four-month odyssey they came to remote Pitcairn, nearly 1,500 miles to the east. Having burned the *Bounty* for security reasons, the isolated little community rapidly degenerated into civil war. Shortage of women, racial incompatibility, lack of sound government, even drunkeness – a distillery was opened in 1798 – contributed to the colony's disastrous adolescence. When the next European ship called at Pitcairn in 1808, revealing the 19-year-old mystery of what had happened to the *Bounty*, seven of the mutineers had died violent deaths, including Fletcher Christian.

But strangely, after these depraved beginnings, the copper-coloured descendants of the first settlers became an innocent, peace-loving community of teetotal, hymn-singing Puritans.

The church and the flagstaff almost hidden among the trees symbolized the Pitcairners' unshakeable loyalty to God and the Queen after they became British subjects in 1838.

Here in Bounty Bay Pitcairn's history began. On January 23, 1790, nine British mutineers, aided by 19 Polynesians, unloaded their stores and, all in tears, burned their ship, the *Bounty*, to hide their tracks.

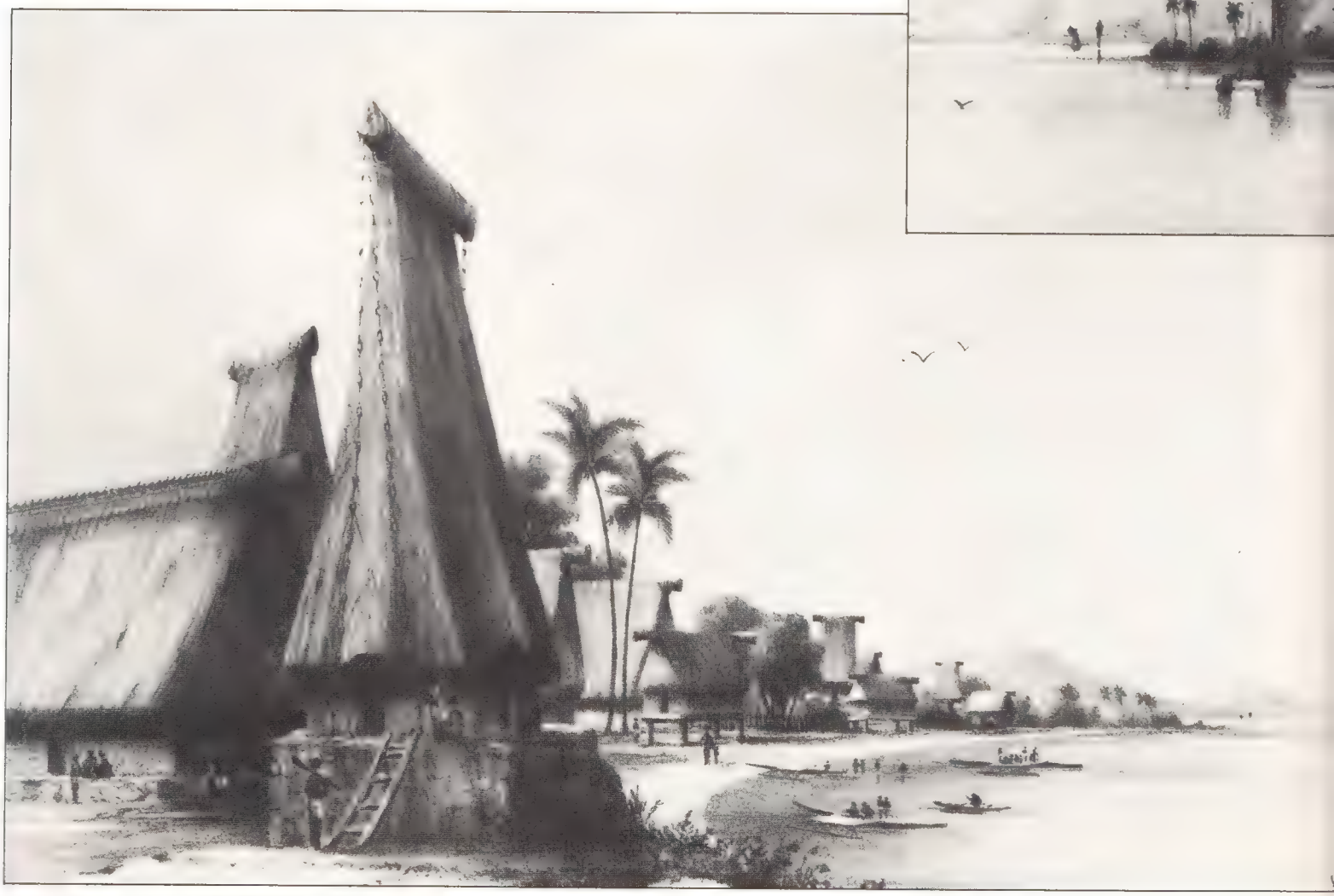
Tahitian girls like this one, whose portraits fed the erotic imagination of 18th-Century Europe, reared the second generation of Pitcairners and bequeathed to the bi-racial community such pleasant customs as the earrings of fresh flowers worn by everyone on the island, men as well as women.

FIJI

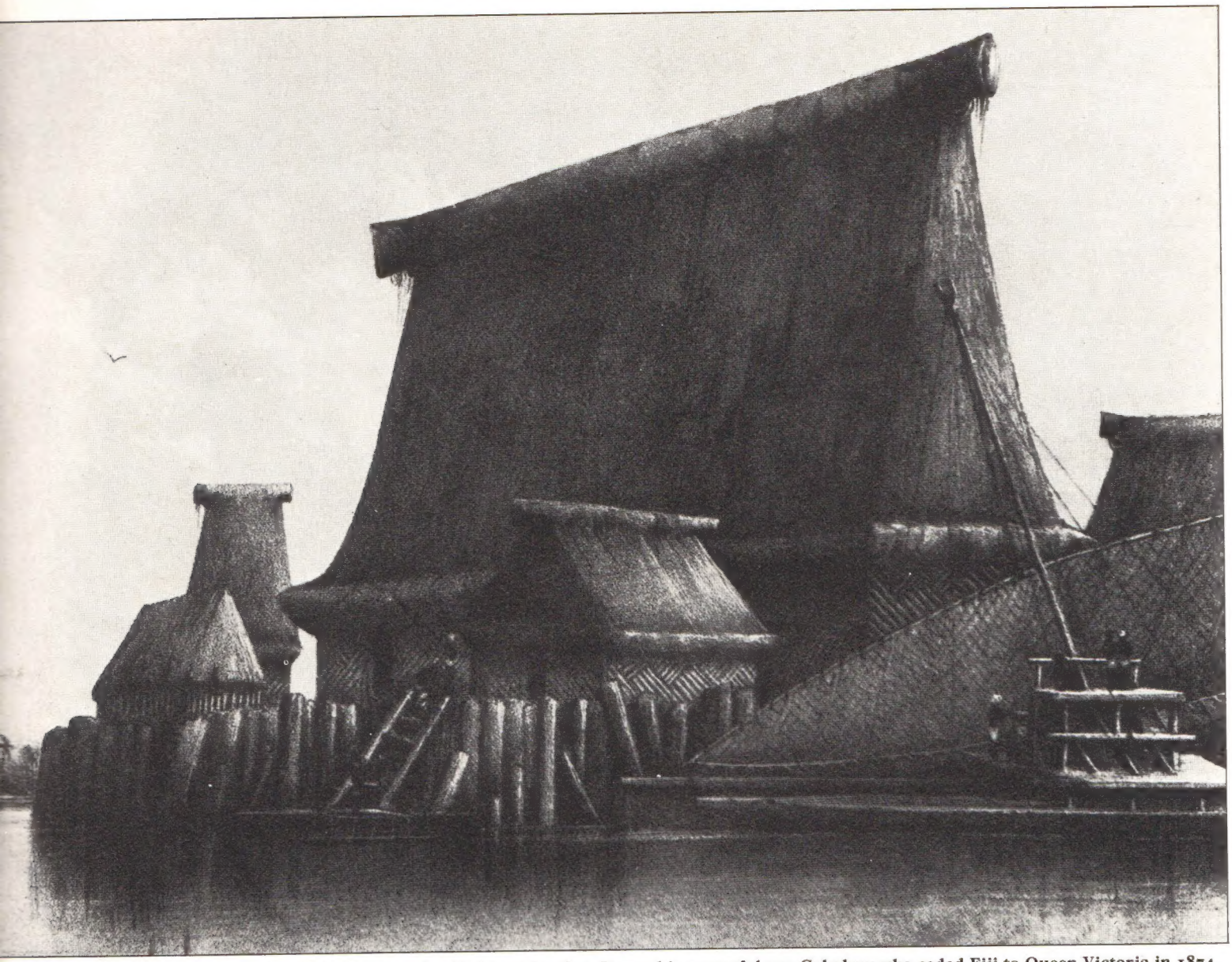
The enchanted isles of Fiji fascinated and repelled the Victorians. The enraptured traveller could gaze out from the mountain summits of Viti Levu, the largest of the group, across a mass of luxuriant tropical foliage, ribbed valleys and towering peaks to an azure sea dotted with innumerable inshore islets and foaming reefs. But, raising his binoculars to the palm-fringed shores, he might pick out woolly haired natives, whose ugly habits contrasted starkly with the beauty of the landscape. It was their custom, Europeans discovered with horror, to roast their enemies – and even unpopular relatives – alive, and eat them with three vegetables to help the digestion (human flesh on its own, they said, caused constipation for up to three days). They practised infanticide, euthanasia and the strangling of widows. For superstitious reasons they would launch canoes on living rollers – lines of prostrate Fijians who were thus instantly crushed to death –and use their own people as corner-posts for chiefs' houses, burying them alive in the foundations.

Wesleyan missionaries, who arrived in 1835, gradually suppressed such customs. Their greatest success was the conversion in 1854 of Cakobau, a powerful chief known to traders and travellers as the King of the Cannibal Isles. After he had renounced the flesh and the devil, cannibalism and superstitious brutalities noticeably declined. The missionaries were jubilant.

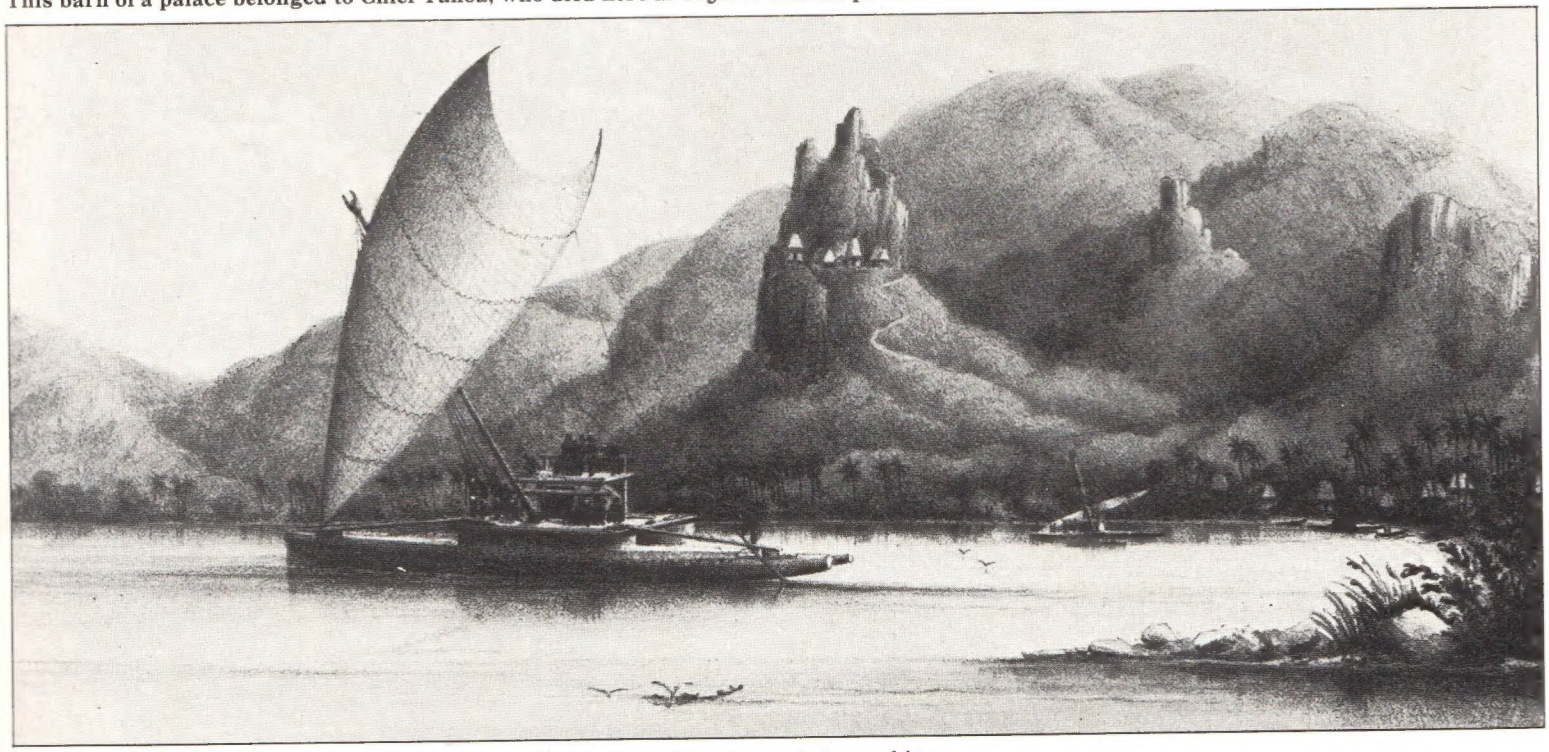
But, once tamed, the Fijians were swamped by Western "progress." White settlers arrived, imported vast numbers of Indian labourers to work on their plantations, and operated their own crude administration. When Britain annexed Fiji in 1874, the first Governor brought the unofficial colonists to heel and instituted an enlightened system of native self-government. But Fijian society withered. Today there are fewer Fijians in Fiji than Indians.



The Fijian temple, distinguished by the chains of white shells decorating its peaked roof, was a store of sacred ornaments, council chamber, banqueting hall and hotel all in one.



This barn of a palace belonged to Chief Tanoa, who died here in 1852. It was his powerful son Cakobau who ceded Fiji to Queen Victoria in 1874.



A large, twin-hulled canoe, built by native carpenters and capable of amazing speed in a good wind, coasts through a quiet bay on Ovalau, one of Fiji's spiky, volcanic islands.

A Pattern of Islands

This chronological survey reveals a pattern in the growth of Britain's island empire. In five historical periods since 1609, the limelight first plays on the Caribbean, shifts to the Indian Ocean and, after a pause, finally focuses on the Pacific. After 1918 Pacific islands previously German join the Commonwealth under Australian and New Zealand administration.

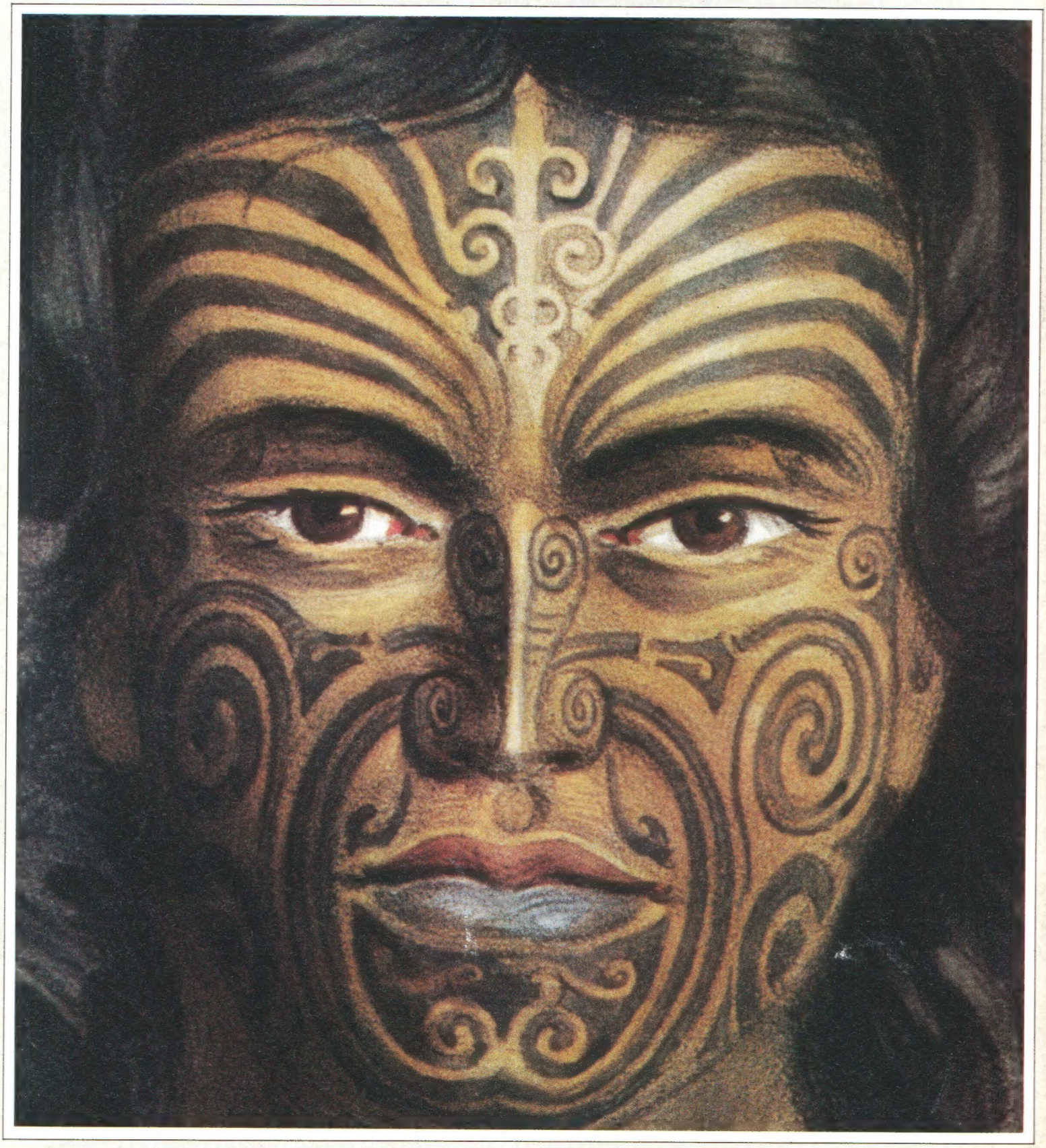
ACQUIRED	ATLANTIC	CARIBBEAN	INDIAN OCEAN AND RED SEA	PACIFIC AND FAR EAST	MEDITERRANEAN
1609	**Bermuda Is (20)**				
1627		Barbados (166)			
1628		**St. Vincent (132)**			
		Barbuda (62)			
1632		**Nevis (50)**			
		Antigua (170)			
		Montserrat (32)			
1650		**Anguilla (35)**			
1655		**Cayman Is (104)**			
		Jamaica (4,200)			
1658	**St. Helena (47)**				
1666		**Virgin Is (57)** *Tortola*			
1713		**St. Kitts (65)**			
1763		Tobago (114)			
		Dominica (291)			
1783		**Bahama Is (4,466)** *New Providence*			
		Turks and Caicos Is (169) *Grand Turk*			
		Grenada (133)			
1784			Chagos Is		
1786				Penang (400)	
1788				Bounty Is* (½)	
				Chatham Is (372)	
				Lord Howe I. (10)	
				Norfolk I. (15)	
1791			Laccadive Is (11)		
1794			**Seychelles (79)** *Mahé*		
1800				Antipodes Is* (24)	Malta (117)
1802		Trinidad (1,862)			
1806				Auckland Is* (234)	
1810			Mauritius (705)	Campbell I. (44)	
1811				Macquarie I.	
1815	**Ascension (34)**	**St. Lucia (233)**	Maldive Is (115)		
			Malé		
1816	**Tristan da Cunha (45)**				
1819	**South Shetland***				
1821	**South Orkney***				
1833	**Falkland Is (4,700)**				
	South Georgia (1,450)				
	South Sandwich*				
1839				**Pitcairn (2)**	
1841				**Hong Kong (29)**	
1846				Labuan (30)	
1849					
1854			Kuria Muria Is		
1857			Perim I.		
			Andaman Is (2,508)		
			Cocos (Keeling) Is (5) *West I.*		
1869				Nicobar Is (635)	
1874				Fiji Is (7,435) Viti Levu	
1877				Spratly I.	
1878				Amboyna Cay	
					Cyprus (3,584)
1881				Rotuma	
1886			Socotra (1,400)	Kermadec Is (30)	
1888			Christmas I. (62)		
1866–89				Line Is *Washington* *Fanning* *Christmas*	
1889				Phoenix Is	
				Tokelau Is	
1890			Zanzibar (640)		
			Pemba (380)		
1868–92				Cook Is (550)	
1892				**Gilbert Is (114)** *Tarawa*	
				Ellice Is (9½)	
1893–99				**South Solomon Is (11,000)**	
1900				Niue (100)	
				Ocean I. (2)	
				Tonga Is (270)	
				Tongatapu	
1906				**New Hebrides (5,700)** *Efate*	
1915			Kamaran (70)		
1920				Bismarck Archipelago to Aus. (19,200) *New Britain* *New Ireland*	
				North Solomon Is to Aus.	
				Western Samoa to NZ (435) *Savii* *Upolu*	
				Nauru to NZ (8)	
1947			Heard I. to Aus.		
			Macdonald I. to Aus.		

Note: Figures in parenthesis are square miles.
Islands in bold type are still British possessions.
Islands in italic type are chief of their groups.

* Uninhabited

Victorian afternoon and evening dress, 1855

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE



MAORI CHALLENGE
THE SETTLING OF NEW ZEALAND